

Opinion: Brown needs to unleash a public works blitz to create jobs

By George Skelton, Los Angeles Times

Don Perata remembers the mood and expectations when the Legislature passed a massive \$37-billion public works program in 2006.

The mood was jubilant, the former Senate leader recalls. Legislators had acted in a very rare bipartisan fashion. And the expectation was that the record-size bond package – pushed hard by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger – would rapidly begin the rebuilding of California’s decaying infrastructure, creating tens of thousands of jobs.

“Everyone was feeling good about what happened. It was one of the high points of my time in the Legislature,” the Oakland Democrat says.

“The common goal was to get the projects out now and don’t let them get stuck with the bureaucrats arguing over whatever they argue about. We had just begun to realize that something was wrong with the economy.”

Voters overwhelmingly approved four bond proposals – for transportation, housing, education and flood control projects. They also passed a fifth bond for water facilities that had reached the ballot through the initiative process. That upped the total bond package to an unprecedented \$43 billion.

“There was a sense of urgency,” Perata says, “and then we lost it.”

Five years later, only roughly half of the authorized bonds have been sold. And of the amount sold, about 30% has not been

spent.

So much for pump-priming the economy in a severe recession.

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